



“I’m going... ..”

Early in the morning, Shido left the house muttering as he always did. Since Kotori had gone to school already, there was no one inside the house. But doing that was what they call a custom.

He locked the door, passed the entrance and went out to the street. After stretching a little and yawning, Shido started walking down the road that led to school.

---Then

“Good morning.”

At that instant, a voice suddenly came from behind him.

“Nh... ..?”

He turned around slowly, and saw a girl standing there.

It was a thin girl who wore her hair pulled back with a buckle that mimicked the wings of an angel. The black blazer which covered her body was just like the one Shido was wearing.

“Oh, Mayuri. Good morning.”

After Shido had recognized the girl’s appearance, he said her name and slightly raised his hand. To answer that, Mayuri nodded slightly, then took a few steps larger than usual and stood next to Shido.

As her uniform says, Mayuri was also a Raizen High School student. Shido glanced to the left while walking next to her.

“Looks like you came out early today, huh?”

“Well, yeah. But the same goes for you too, right, Shido?”

“Well, that’s true, but... ..Eh?”

Mid-sentence, Shido let a drop of sweat run down his cheek.

“You’re always the same, aren’t you? I’m always repeating it, but I’m your senior by a year. I’m not asking you to treat me like a senior, but that’s not how you should call me, right?”

That’s right. Even though they go to the same high school, Shido is a second-year student while Mayuri is a first-year student. And despite this, Mayuri speaks to Shido like he was also a first-year... .. No, not just that, but more like he was a year younger than her.

Truth is, Shido wasn't bothered by that, but since Mayuri didn't change her ways not even at school, his classmates began to mock him saying things like "Eh? Who's that? Your girlfriend? It's more like she's his Master and he's the slave, right?"

"Then, how should I call you? Maybe "senpai"?"

"Eh? Well... .. that wouldn't be too bad."

"Fuun... .."

Mayuri gave a halfhearted response and quickly stood in front of Shido with a spin and then made a small bow.

"Shido-senpai, I greet you good morning. The weather is beautiful today, don't you think?"

"... .."

"What with that "did you eat something bad?" face you just made?"

"A-ah, no... .."

It looks like his face ended up paralyzing due to the strange sensation. Shido placed his hands on his cheeks to massage his face muscles.

"Well, how was that, Shido-senpai? Satisfied?"

"... ..Well, um~... .. When we are alone, let's talk like we always do, please."

"I see."

Mayuri briefly said that and returned to Shido's side with a spin.

They then continued walking down the road to school for a while. The conversations they sometimes had were nothing special. Things like, that he was depressed today due to a small exam, or that there are interesting students in his classroom, or how there is regularity when a teacher calls his students... ..

They were just small things. And also, most of them came from Shido. Mayuri just answered halfheartedly to each of them with "I see.", "Hee", "Fuun".

But, what would it be? Shido couldn't help but think that Mayuri, who was walking next to him, was strangely happy.

No... .. It wasn't just Mayuri. Shido also realized somewhere in his heart that the moment when they were going to school, which wasn't even 30 minutes long, was something irreplaceable.

It was a common scene, the kind which can be seen everywhere. However, for some reason, Shidou was attacked by the urge to engrave each one of these moments deep into his memories and onto his heart.

He felt like he was pouring water onto his hands. It was something that, no matter how much he pressed his fingers together, was slowly decreasing. Finally, at some point, it would go away. Even though it wasn't like Mayuri was going to disappear, when he saw her. For some reason, he felt that way.

"... ..Shido? What's wrong?"

“... ..No, it’s nothing.”

It looks like once again his face gave away his feelings. Apparently, he wasn’t made to play poker.

Not too long after, they arrive to the school. Since they are not in the same year, after entering the school building, Shido and Mayuri went through different hallways.

“Well, see you later.”

“Yes. See you.”

Shido and Mayuri waved their hands at each other and went to their respective classrooms. The bell that signaled midday break rang in his eardrums.

Having finished the fourth hour lesson, Shido took his bento out of his bag. Then, he left the classroom and went to the school building’s rooftop.

“A little more... ..”

After opening the door that led to the rooftop, his field of vision was filled with the color of the sky and the light of the sun.

There was someone there. Sitting with her back against the fence, Mayuri had her lunch box placed on her lap.

“Oh. You’re early, Mayuri.”

“Nah. Lessons finished earlier than usual.”

Shido echoed his footsteps, \*ton\*, \*ton\*, on the rooftop and sat next to Mayuri.

That’s right. It wasn’t something they’d have proposed, but Shido and Mayuri usually ate their lunches together like this.

Shido placed the bento box he had on his hands onto his lap and opened the lid. Then, Mayuri watched carefully what Shido had on his hands.

“... ..”

“Wh-what’s wrong?”

“... ..Nothing. I just thought that, as always, it looks delicious.”

After hearing this, Shido looked at his own hands. Inside the bento box were the routine fittings, such as karaage<sup>1</sup> and tamagoyaki. Shido didn’t believe that what he had prepared was something that special.

“Really? Looks quite normal to me... .. This one here, for example, is just leftovers from yesterday’s dinner.”

After Shido said that, Mayuri let out a breath, “Haa”.

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<sup>1</sup> Karaage (揚げ) is a Japanese cooking technique in which several ingredients –usually meat, especially chicken- are fried in oil.

“If a boy cooks this well, there’s no way a girl who could compete. Especially because you really seem to believe it’s nothing special.”

“What are you saying?... .. Rather, yours looks quite delicious too.”

Shido pointed towards the bento box Mayuri was holding. Inside there were aligned perfectly cut sandwiches. Between the breads, there were ingredients of several colors that were so well prepared that they invited the appetite.

“... ..Thanks. But these are what I call something normal. It’s just some ingredients mixed inside two breads.”

“But the one who chose those ingredients was your taste, right?”

“Well, if you put it that way, you may be right.”

Mayuri said that while making a complicated expression.

At that moment, Shido came up with an idea and grabbed his own bento box and offered it to Mayuri.

“Then let’s trade our bentos.”

“Eh?”

Upon those words, Mayuri opened her eyes wide.

“Eh, but...”

“It’s ok. I’ve wanted to try your cooking for a while now.”

“... ..”

Mayuri put on a hesitant attitude, but after hearing those words from Shido, she took her own bento box and offered it to him.

“Just don’t judge me too harshly...”

“That’s what I say.”

Then, they both traded their bento boxes. After watching carefully the bento they had received, they placed their hands together at the same time.

“Thanks for the food.”

“Thanks for the food.”

After saying this, Mayuri took her sticks and tried some tamagoyaki.

Then, almost immediately, she opened her eyes wide.

“\*Waa\* What’s this? It’s delicious.”

Shido felt good after hearing that and loosened his cheeks a little.

“It’s good, isn’t it? The trick is to cook it a little sweet.”

“Yeah... .. And also, isn’t this golden color too perfect? If I had to cook it, it would have ended up black.”

“For the eggs, since a little bit of heat is enough, the trick is to roll them up quickly. If you practice preparing them many times, you get the hang of it at just the right time to do it.”

After explaining it simply, Shido grabbed Mayuri’s sandwich. He opened his mouth wide and stuffed his cheeks with it.

“Ah, it’s very good. But, what is this flavor? It tastes like peanut butter, but... ..”

“Oh, that. It’s kinako cream. I don’t know why, but I like it a lot.”

“Hehe? Those things happen? Then, what’s this one made of?”

“Oyakodon style chicken and egg... .. Or that’s how I call it anyway. I just thought they would mix well.”

“Wow... You do some interesting things... ..Eh? The toothpick is nailed to this cherry tomato, why is the tip cross-shaped?”

“I-I don’t see anything wrong with that... .. And more importantly, this karaage is too good. Tell me how you spiced it.”

“Fuffufu... You have good taste, I see. However, that’s an Itsuka house secret. I can’t go spreading around the secret flavor just like... ..”

“Ah, maybe it’s apple and onion?”

“You found out that quickly?!”

And while having these sorts of conversations, they kept on eating lunch.

Finally, both of their bento boxes were empty and the two of them, after letting out a sigh, placed their hands together.

“Thanks for the food.”

“Thanks for the food.”

They then traded their bento boxes again and put them inside their lunch bags.

“I don’t see why you were complaining. As I thought, it was delicious. Have more faith in yourself.”

“... ..Thanks. But I’m still thinking that your bento was even more delicious, Shido... ..What the problem.”

“No, why do you have a problem?”

“... ..That’s my business.”

After saying that, Mayuri stood and shook her skirt a little.

“More importantly, midday break is about to end, right? We were eating longer than usual.”

“Ah... .. Is it that late already?”

Then, at the same time this scene was happening, the bell rang again inside the school building. Since they had traded their opinions on each other’s lunches, it looks like that it had taken a lot of their time.

“Well, I’ll be going now, all right?”

As Mayuri said that, she lightly waved her hand before she started walking.

“Yeah, then we’ll----“

Shido saw Mayuri’s back----

And when he realized, without knowing why, he was grabbing her hand.

“Eh... ...?”

Mayuri turned around towards Shido in surprise.

“What is it, Shido? Classes are about to start, you know?”

“Eh? Ah, I, why... ...?”

When he heard what Mayuri said, Shido tilted his neck. He himself didn’t know the reason why he grabbed Mayuri’s hand at that moment. But, why was that? A terrible sense of insecurity came to him for letting Mayuri get away like that. Shido made his head work desperately and tried to search for the words he should say next.

But good phrases never appear when one needs them the most. What came out of Shido’s mouth was:

“A little more... ...”

“Eh?”

“... ...Could you stay by my side for just a little more?”

They were easy and simple words.

“Shido... ...?”

Mayuri opened her eyes wide in surprise.

Then, as if to match with that, the bell that announced the beginning of afternoon classes echoed in the surroundings.

While looking slightly above towards the sky, Mayuri let out a sigh \*Fuu\*.

“Aah~. We can’t.”

“Uh... ... I’m-I’m sorry.”

After Shido said that with a gloomy expression, Mayuri suddenly relaxed her mouth and sat next to Shido once again. Then, like that, she laid down with her head on his lap.

“Ma-Mayuri?”

“Since you held me back on purpose, take responsibility all right?”

After saying that, Mayuri showed him a little smile.

Since she was being illuminated by the sun above them, her face was shining brightly.